

## Youth Competency Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Strength-Based Developmental Approach

**Definition:** Youth Competency Assessment (YCA) is a brief format and process for identifying strengths, competencies, and capabilities that will enable professionals, family members, and community members to build service and case plans that reflect specific pro-social competency development goals across a variety of juvenile justice settings. Three assessment areas include: A) Support efforts to repair harm; B) Pathways toward a healthy identity; and C) Indicators of mechanisms to connect youth to community, family, and peers. The YCA is designed to be delivered in concert with traditional risk and problem assessment. It is designed to be utilized in conjunction with a parallel community asset and resource inventory process.

### Domain A: Support Efforts to Repair Harm

This category is designed to identify those indicators of moral development specifically geared toward making amends for problems, difficulties, pain caused to others due to commission of his/her behavior. Specific attention should be focused on culturally specific ways that wrongdoing is addressed, harm acknowledged, and accountability structures and practices set in motion. Specific resources to provide balanced and restorative justice programming in a culturally congruent framework are needed.

#### Examples:

- a. Experience with acknowledging wrongdoing.
- b. Remorse, regret.
- c. Capacity for empathy.
- d. Family members, friends who anchor youth in an appropriate sense of right and wrong.
- e. Experiences in which he/she has been wronged and then apologized to.
- f. Experiences with others being empathetic with him/her.
- g. Desire/willingness to apologize.
- h. Ability to dialogue about how he/she might repair damage caused by delinquent activities.
- i. Ability/willingness to link his/her abilities to positive community activities.

### Domain B: Pathways Toward a Healthy Identity

This category is designed to identify those resources, interests, and capabilities for pro-social development in his/her environment that are most likely to “grow” positive components to his/her identity and progress towards healthy and successful development and engagement in post-juvenile justice system life. Special attention should be focused on models of culturally specific and relevant models of success and health for a particular youth, family, and a community. Special knowledge of youth-serving community institutions (i.e., schools, youth leaderships, faith communities, and community resources such as Boys Clubs) that are willing to work with youth in the juvenile justice system are required.

#### Examples:

- a. Previous experience overcoming challenges or accomplishing personal, family, or team goals (however defined by youth).
- b. Skills and abilities (music, math ability, athletics).
- c. Pro-social interests, ideas for activities that both challenge and interest him/her.
- d. Experiences with success.
- e. Positive view of personal future.
- f. Ability to identify places where he/she can feel safe.
- g. Willingness to access known and risk discomfort in developing new pro-social relationships in the community.
- h. Willingness/ability to engage in life planning and development of a positive future action plan.

### Domain C: Indicators of Mechanisms to Connect Youth to Community, Family, and Peers

This category is designed to identify those relational capacities or potentials that directly hold the possibility of social relationships in the community with pro-social partners. Specific attention should be focused toward the presence of cultural resources (both for the youth and in the youth’s family and community). This category specifically involves community resources in new ways and requires a careful and in-depth understanding of both traditional and non-traditional community resources, social capital and cultural dynamics in a variety of community settings.

#### Examples:

- a. Willingness to engage with or experiences with mentoring.
- b. Willingness to engage with or experiences with employment and/or education. Career aspirations and interest in career exploration.
- c. Experiences with leadership.
- d. Experiences with being a teacher or mentor to others.
- e. Experiences with generosity
- f. Presence of pro-social role models in the community – either known or through specific community resources known to youth, family, or professional. Specific focus on former offenders who have turned their lives around in a positive way.
- g. Willingness/interest in offering self in service-oriented activities to the community and others in need.
- h. Willingness/interest in participating in social action/community-building activities.
- i. Willingness/interest in identifying and building on family strengths.
- j. Willingness/interest in identifying and building on peer strengths.